High blood pressure: A force to be reckoned with

High blood pressure (also called hypertension) increases your chances of having a heart attack, heart failure, stroke, kidney disease, and other life-threatening illnesses. Anyone can get it, and as you get older, the likelihood of your developing high blood pressure increases, especially if you are overweight or obese or have diabetes.

African Americans are most likely to develop high blood pressure than any other racial or ethnic group. For African Americans, high blood pressure:

- Tends to be more common and more severe
- Happens at an earlier age
- Is a leading cause of death for people with type 2 diabetes
- Is the major reason why African Americans are 8 times more likely to develop kidney failure than Caucasians
- Is a major reason why African Americans die at an earlier age

The good news is that high blood pressure can be controlled. Better yet, it can be prevented.

Enlist in this vital mission for a healthier you
9 things you can do to prevent and control high blood pressure

1. **Lose weight if you are overweight and maintain a healthy weight.** Limit portion sizes, especially of high calorie foods, and try to eat only as many calories as you burn each day—or less if you want to lose weight.

2. **Eat heart healthfully.** Follow an eating plan that emphasizes fruits, vegetables, and low fat dairy products and is moderate in total fat and low in saturated fat and cholesterol.

3. **Reduce salt and sodium intake.** Read food labels to choose canned, processed, and convenience foods that are lower in sodium. Limit sodium intake to no more than 2400 mg, or about 1 teaspoon’s worth, of salt each day. Avoid fast foods that are high in salt and sodium.

4. **If you drink alcoholic beverages, do so in moderation.** For men, that means a maximum of 2 drinks a day, for women, a maximum of 1.

5. **Become more physically active.** Work up to at least 30 minutes of a moderate-level activity, such as brisk walking or bicycling, each day. If you don’t have 30 minutes, try to find 2 15-minute periods or even 3 10-minute periods for physical activity.

6. **Quit smoking.** Smoking increases your chances of developing a stroke, heart disease, peripheral arterial disease, and several forms of cancer.

7. **If you are pregnant, make sure you are under a doctor’s care.** High blood pressure is a major cause of complications in pregnancy.

8. **Talk with your health care professional.** Ask what your blood pressure numbers are and what they mean.

9. **Take medication as prescribed.** If you need medication, make sure you understand what it’s for and how and when to take it, then take it as your doctor recommends.

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National High Blood Pressure Education Program

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